

Editor's Note: The cover story of our March-April 2001 Program Manager, "Contractors and Operational Testing: Some Involvement is Legal and Necessary," generated three follow-up articles: the first in the July-August 2001 Program Manager (pp. 94-96); the second in the November-December 2001 issue (pp. 22-25); and the third in the November-December 2001 issue (pp. 64-67). John Stoddart, now President of Defense at Oshkosh Truck, responds to all three articles with the following open letter to Thomas Christie, Director, Operational Test and Evaluation, Office of the Secretary of Defense.

On behalf of the NDIA Industrial Committee on Operational Test and Evaluation (ICOTE), I would like to congratulate you on your new and challenging position as DoD Director of OT&E. As you know from your attendance at the committee's June 2001 meeting in Washington, D.C., the committee is seeking to improve the OT&E and overall acquisition processes. We solicit your participation, guidance, and assistance in our efforts.

In these days of war on terrorism, we all face two common goals:

- Ensure systems are fully tested before fielding.
- Speed up the acquisition process.

The first challenge and common goal facing testers, government program managers, and industry is to ensure that a system is fully tested in accordance with the user's requirements before fielding. The greatest help to testers and contractors in this area would be to have clear, unambiguous, realistic user requirements. The new 5000-series documents include a spiral development concept that may help us more quickly field systems, reduce OT [Operational Test] risk, and provide disciplined growth to an objective set of requirements. We believe the testers should be involved in the requirements process early on to ensure success.

It is also very important that users, testers, and contractors establish good communications early in a program. Operational testers should help develop and closely follow Developmental Tests (DT) so that the results can be used to the maximum

extent possible in overall OT assessments. Contractors should have access to the Test and Evaluation Master Plan, the OT test site, and early test results. Collectively, we should also make maximum use of modeling and simulation results to support both DT and OT evaluations. It is possible that adoption of some of these procedures will help us achieve our common goal of conducting timely, complete, and realistic testing in the most efficient manner possible.

The second goal is to speed up the acquisition schedule in order to provide the timely fielding of rapidly changing technology. Attempts to speed up testing can result in unrealistic schedules and added risk. On the other hand, an unnecessarily long System Development and Demonstration (SDD) phase is generally not desirable to the government or the contractor because it does not provide a timely fielding of technology to the user. It also has an adverse effect on the industrial base because profits are usually made on full-rate production. Although the OT phase alone is not a major portion of the overall acquisition schedule, taken together with the evaluation and correction of deficiencies phases, there may be room for some acceleration if the testers, government program managers, and the contractors work together.

We would be pleased to work with you to help overcome the current challenges in our testing and overall acquisition processes.

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